

ISSUE
ANALYSIS
REPORT

 The New Teacher Project

SMART SPENDING
FOR BETTER TEACHER
EVALUATION SYSTEMS

FIVE KEY INVESTMENTS
FOR SUCCESSFUL
IMPLEMENTATION

Smart Spending for Better Teacher Evaluations

This fall, the nine states that finished as runners up in last year's groundbreaking Race to the Top competition will have an opportunity to reapply for a grant. The winners will receive a combined \$200 million to help implement the bold education reform plans they developed last year.

Almost all of these plans put improving teacher evaluations front and center, and with good reason: Better evaluation systems represent a critical first step toward reversing [the widget effect](#)—the tendency of school systems to treat teachers as interchangeable parts, not valuable professionals—and ensuring that all students learn from effective teachers.

Many of the eligible states already have clear roadmaps toward evaluations that promise to provide a far more complete, accurate picture of how well teachers are helping their students learn, along with useful feedback that helps teachers grow professionally. Some have even codified these plans into law.

Now comes the hard part. As states across the country have already learned, strong implementation will determine whether a new evaluation system lives up to its potential. Even the most elegantly designed evaluation system won't succeed unless schools implement it consistently and accurately.

Of course, states cannot directly manage the implementation of a new evaluation system in hundreds or thousands of schools (especially since some states allow each district to develop a system that meets certain standards rather than developing a common statewide model). But states *can* help districts and schools navigate what may be a difficult transition to more rigorous instructional standards and to a greater investment of time and resources in teacher evaluation and development.

The third round of Race to the Top could provide the nine eligible states with the resources they need to do this—but only if they apply the money toward the right priorities.¹

¹ Note: While we believe our recommendations will help states address an important priority of Race to the Top, The New Teacher Project has no insight into how the Education Department will score Round 3 applications. Including these recommendations in an application will not guarantee a grant.

Designing Better Teacher Evaluations

In [Teacher Evaluation 2.0 \(2010\)](#), The New Teacher Project identified six design standards that any teacher evaluation system must meet in order to be effective:

1. Annual process
2. Clear, rigorous expectations
3. Multiple measures
4. Multiple ratings
5. Regular feedback
6. Significance

Many states and districts have already designed evaluation models that meet these six standards, including the Rhode Island Department of Education, District of Columbia Public Schools, New Haven (Connecticut) Public Schools, and the Houston Independent School District.*

We recommend that states eligible for the third round of Race to the Top that have not already designed a new evaluation system should seek to adapt these existing models rather than designing entirely new ones (leaving little funding to invest in implementation).

*TNTP has helped several of these states and districts design or implement their new evaluation systems.

Below, we outline the investments we believe states should make in order to ensure that schools implement their new teacher evaluation systems successfully. These investments fall into five major categories:



Tools and Systems

to guide and support the evaluation process

- Rubrics and related tools
- Value-added model
- Student learning measures
- Data system



Training

for evaluators and key school district staff

- Training modules
- Assessment of evaluators



Communications

to key audiences, especially educators

- Staff
- Planning
- Materials
- Website



Monitoring and Support

to ensure consistent implementation

- Metrics of success
- Support teams
- Accountability for evaluators



Sustainability

of new systems over time

- Analysis of annual costs
- Audit of org structure
- Continuous improvement

Guiding Principles for Implementing Effective Evaluation Systems

Good processes are necessary but insufficient: Designing better evaluation models is a critical first step, but implementing them is even harder and will require more resources. Implementation challenges extend far beyond logistics: States will need to find ways to change the culture of many schools in order to sustain rigorous, honest conversations about instruction. Human behavior is a key factor. Any implementation plan that ignores the needs, expectations, and baseline skills of teachers and school leaders or the cultural context of schools and districts will fail.

Invest in one-time expenses: Race to the Top funds represent a one-time infusion of resources to support innovation. States should avoid using these funds to create essential systems or positions that they cannot afford to maintain over the long term. Whenever possible, states should seek to cover recurring expenses by reallocating existing resources and staff. In particular, states can use federal Title II funding as necessary to support ongoing implementation costs.

Expect to make changes: It is unlikely that new evaluation policies or systems will work perfectly in their first year. States should set aside money to monitor the early results of new policies, gather feedback from stakeholders, and make any necessary changes.





Tools and Systems

Certain tools and systems are critical to the success of any new teacher evaluation system. A Race to the Top grant can help states build, buy or adapt several essential tools and systems:

Rubrics and related tools: Classroom observations of teachers at work will be a major part of any comprehensive evaluation system. States need to provide districts with models of summative rating tools, as well as rigorous but easy-to-use rubrics that focus primarily on student behaviors (as opposed to teacher behaviors). These tools will help evaluators make accurate ratings and give useful feedback to teachers. Even off-the-shelf observation rubrics will require modification, so states should also plan to allocate time and resources to adapting rubrics to their specific needs and context.



TIP: Our 2011 report, ["Rating a Teacher Observation Tool,"](#) provides detailed guidelines for selecting teacher observation rubrics and criteria.

Teacher value-added model: A teacher's primary professional responsibility is to ensure that students learn. Therefore, evidence of student learning should play a predominant role in teacher evaluations. Value-added is one of the best tools currently available to measure a teacher's impact on student academic growth while controlling for important factors such as class size and socioeconomic background; as such, it should be among the multiple measures of teacher performance included in any comprehensive evaluation system. Many states already have value-added models that they can incorporate into evaluations; those that do not should work with experts to develop one.

Measures of student learning for "non-tested" grades and subjects: Because states only test students annually in certain grades and subjects, value-added ratings will not be available for all teachers. States should work with the appropriate vendors and experts to develop objective measures of student academic progress aligned to state standards—ideally state- or district-wide end-of-course assessments or performance tasks, not necessarily in the form of standardized tests—in the remaining grades and subjects. Since it will take time to develop these assessments, we recommend that states also develop student learning measures that they can implement immediately. (One possibility is a rigorous goal-setting process that relies on locally-generated or teacher-created assessments.)

Data system: A data system for collecting and reporting school- and district-level evaluation information (e.g., summative teacher evaluation ratings) will be crucial for monitoring districts' progress in implementing new evaluation processes, providing targeted mid-year implementation support, and analyzing trends in evaluation results. Ideally, evaluators across the state should be able to access the data system to record evaluation data so that districts do not have to build their own systems. Teachers should also have access to this system to review and verify information that will become part of their evaluations. The data system (or, at a minimum, the data entry component of the system) should be



available in advance of implementation of the new evaluation system, since evaluators and district staff will need to have the necessary training to begin entering evaluation results early in the school year.²



TIP: States that win grants and choose to focus on evaluation reform should look for opportunities to work together to develop common tools and systems. For example, states could pool resources and develop common assessments for non-tested subjects, or build a single data system that each state could easily adapt.



Training

Effectively evaluating teachers is a people-heavy task, and everyone involved—especially school leaders—will need training to ensure that the system can be implemented fairly, accurately and consistently. A Race to the Top grant can fund several essential initial investments in training:

Training modules: States should develop and prepare districts to deliver training modules for evaluators, evaluators' managers, and teachers. Topics for evaluators might include:

- Overview of the new system
- Conducting effective classroom observations
- Analyzing and using student data in evaluations
- Providing clear, constructive feedback to teachers
- Managing time and resources to implement the new system
- Tracking evaluation data
- Communicating with teachers about the new system

Many of these trainings can be delivered as online modules, if the state is able to partner with an individual or company with expertise in online learning and credentialing for adults. Other topics, such as providing effective feedback to teachers, will need to be covered in person. States should hire trainers to prepare district personnel to train evaluators in these topics.

Post-training assessment for evaluators: Evaluations conducted by unprepared administrators will undermine any new system. Therefore, states should develop a method districts can use at the end of training to assess evaluators' ability to rate teachers fairly, accurately and reliably. States should use the results of this process to gauge the effectiveness of their training modules and set aside resources to make any necessary changes. This assessment will also help norm ratings statewide and help districts provide ongoing, targeted support to evaluators. States should consider using this assessment to enforce minimum standards that all evaluators must meet before they are allowed to conduct official evaluations.

² Over time, states will need to develop more comprehensive data systems that link together evaluation data, student learning data, professional development opportunities and other information. However, most states will find it unfeasible to develop these systems with the Race to the Top funding available this year.





Communications

The success of any new teacher evaluation system often hinges on whether it is explained to stakeholders—especially teachers—in a clear, compelling way. Understandably, many teachers and school leaders are anxious about how they will be evaluated, and misinformation about emerging evaluation systems is common. Race to the Top funding can help states take several essential steps to communicate about new evaluation systems effectively:

Staff: States need to devote sufficient staff to handling communications with districts, the media, and other external audiences. At a minimum, states should have one full-time staff member whose primary job is to manage all communications related to the first year of implementation of a new evaluation system. Many states may be able to reallocate existing communications or press office staff to this role.

Planning: It's essential for states to create a clear plan for communicating with all key stakeholders—superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, unions, community leaders and the media—before and during the rollout of a new evaluation system. The primary goal of this plan should be providing clear, consistent information to districts, along with resources and strategies that will help them communicate effectively with their teachers and principals. In particular, states should develop a process for quickly responding to questions and feedback from district staff. States that allow districts to develop their own evaluation systems will need to focus especially closely on helping districts create communications plans for their stakeholders (e.g., by developing model plans that school districts can easily customize).



TIP: Plans should emphasize face-to-face and peer-to-peer communications as much as possible—e.g., opportunities for teachers who helped design an evaluation system to explain it to other teachers.

Materials: States will need to design and distribute concise, compelling introductory materials on their new evaluation system customized for all key audiences (e.g., 1-2 page overviews of the system and “frequently asked questions” documents). In addition, states will need to develop and distribute detailed guidebooks on the system for superintendents, evaluators and teachers. These materials are in addition to any materials required for formal trainings. States should also strongly consider developing basic branding materials (name, logo, etc.) that can be used for all communications about the new system. States that allow districts to develop their own evaluation systems should develop templates and samples of these materials that districts can adapt.

Website: States that create a common system for all districts to use should develop and plan to maintain a user-friendly website that can serve as repository for information and updates about their new evaluation system. The website should also give teachers, principals and other stakeholders opportunities to ask questions and submit feedback about the system. Where necessary, states may need to develop and plan to maintain an internal website about the new system aimed exclusively at district and school staff.





Monitoring and Support

Even the right tools, effective training and clear communication will not guarantee that a new evaluation system will achieve its goals. To ensure consistently accurate results, states must monitor the implementation of new systems and help districts and schools norm ratings. A Race to the Top grant can fund several essential elements of this oversight:

Metrics of success: States should develop clear standards for what constitutes a meaningful distribution of teacher ratings and should analyze all district- and school-level evaluation results against these benchmarks. A state's goal should not be to mandate that schools or districts achieve a specific percentage of teachers at each rating level, but rather to set reasonable parameters that allow them to identify schools and districts that are struggling to implement the new system as intended. The metrics should also become part of accountability systems for evaluators and evaluators' managers.

Support teams: States should assemble teams with operational and legal expertise to monitor and support implementation in every district during the first year of a new system (and on an ongoing basis if possible). Prior to the rollout of the new system, these teams should assess the implementation challenges each district will face and recommend strategies for addressing them. The teams should also offer customized support to each district. In addition, teams should report on the most common implementation challenges districts are facing and help share best practices statewide. Since district and school staff should feel comfortable speaking honestly with these teams about implementation challenges, states may want to structure teams so that they are "outside observers" (i.e., team members assigned to a particular district do not regularly work with or play a role in enforcing accountability for that district).



TIP: Possible support activities include leading trainings on key aspects of the new system (observation rubrics, providing feedback to teachers, etc.), suggesting strategies to help evaluators conduct the required number of observations, providing guidance on communicating with teachers and principals, and providing assistance to principals in making and enforcing personnel decisions in response to evaluation ratings.

Accountability for evaluators: In the months prior to implementing a new evaluation system, states should hold a series of intensive trainings for all managers of principals to help them hold evaluators accountable for teacher evaluation and development (above and beyond changes to principal accountability systems that many states are already planning). Topics might include the best ways to assess principals' implementation of the new evaluation system, the most effective ways to help principals overcome implementation challenges (both technical and communications-related), and how to analyze evaluation data.





Sustainability

Even as they work to launch new evaluation systems successfully, states must also plan for the long-term viability of their new systems—financially and substantively. A Race to the Top grant can fund the planning that will help evaluation systems become valuable tools for years to come:

Analysis of annual costs: States should determine and plan to cover the annual costs of operating their new evaluation systems (or supporting districts in operating theirs) without one-time Race to the Top funding. In particular, they will need to work with districts to identify ways to pay for staff to provide ongoing evaluation training, norming and reporting. States should place special emphasis on helping districts shift resources to schools that will need additional support to implement a new evaluation system over the long term; for example, schools with extremely high teacher-to-administrator ratios.

Audit of organizational structure: Most state departments of education will need to make changes to their staffing and internal budgets in order to provide effective long-term support to districts on new evaluation systems. These changes can serve as models for similar changes that will likely need to happen at the district level.

Continuous improvement: No evaluation system will be perfect in its first year (or in any year). States should design a process and allocate funding to gather feedback (or help districts gather feedback, where applicable) on their new systems throughout the year from teachers, principals and district staff—e.g., through surveys and focus groups— and to make necessary changes to the systems each year based on this feedback. States should create a similar process to gather and respond to feedback about the support and training they provide to evaluators.

* * *

Implementing a new teacher evaluation system is hard work, but the payoff is well worth the effort. Better evaluations are critical; not only will they ensure that teachers get the meaningful feedback they deserve as professionals, but that school leaders get the information they need to retain their most effective teachers, remove consistently low-performing teachers, and help all teachers reach their full potential in the classroom. The third round of Race to the Top gives nine states an extraordinary opportunity to create systems that will benefit teachers, principals and students for years to come. It's an opportunity these states can't afford to squander. By spending strategically on the essential components of a sound implementation plan, these states are more likely to take their first steps toward better teacher evaluations without stumbling.



About The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) strives to end the injustice of educational inequality by providing excellent teachers to the students who need them most and by advancing policies and practices that ensure effective teaching in every classroom. A national nonprofit organization founded by teachers, TNTP is driven by the knowledge that effective teachers have a greater impact on student achievement than any other school factor. In response, TNTP develops customized programs and policy interventions that enable education leaders to find, develop and keep great teachers. Since its inception in 1997, TNTP has recruited or trained approximately 43,000 teachers-mainly through its highly selective Teaching Fellows programs-benefiting an estimated 7 million students. TNTP has also released a series of acclaimed studies of the policies and practices that affect the quality of the nation's teacher workforce, including [*The Widget Effect*](#) (2009) and [*Teacher Evaluation 2.0*](#) (2010). Today TNTP is active in more than 25 cities, including 10 of the nation's 15 largest. For more information, visit www.tntp.org.